

“Effective Management of Catering Overproduction can Help Alleviate Food Insecurity in the Community: A Case Study of the South Beach Wine & Food Festival”

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to show that by following a strategic plan of action, any catering company, restaurant, hotel or other hospitality entity may efficiently dispose of catering overproduction in a socially responsible way that helps to feed those who need it most in the local community. The authors take the case of the South Beach Wine and Food Festival, and the collection efforts of social welfare agency Feeding South Florida, as an example of CSR give-back on a grand event scale. Through personal observations and interviews with stakeholders at all levels the authors intend to provide a road map for event organizers and catering organizations who may wish to cooperate in a similar way to the benefit of their local food-insecure populations.

Key Words: Wine & Food Festival, Catering Overproduction, Food Insecurity, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, Giving Back.

The South Beach Wine and Food Festival (SobeFest) lends itself well to an interdisciplinary case study on this topic due to the uniqueness of the event itself (largest of its kind in the U.S.A., star-studded, posh beach location) and for the results obtained from an internal, charitable give-back effort, all in close proximity to a large food-insecure population.

The 10th annual SobeFest will take place this coming February, 2011 on South Beach, Miami, Florida. Co-founded by Florida International University's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management (SHTM) and beverage distributor Southern Wine and Spirits, the event caters annually to more than 50,000 guests over a four-day period. Visitors to the festival readily spend well over \$200 per event to mingle with celebrity chefs from cable television's Food Network and to be served fine wines and delicacies by more than 100 prominent vintners, restaurateurs and suppliers to the restaurant and catering industries.

In 2006 a local charitable organization known as The Daily Bread Food Bank began to augment its Miami collection efforts by picking up unused overproduction at the SobeFest for redistribution to the local food-insecure population. Less than 3,000 lbs. of food was collected that first year. From 2007-2009 an average of 5,000 lbs. of food was collected by the agency. In 2009 the organization merged with a nationwide network of similar agencies and thus became part of Feeding America, changing its name to Feeding South Florida (FSF). Under new leadership a greater involvement was sought in the 2010 festival. With expanded interest, greater cooperation and more advanced planning, FSF was able to exceed all previous collection and redistribution efforts in the 2010 event. It is interesting to note that according to FSF officials, one pound of food collected equates to an average of two meals delivered to the needy, therefore it has been estimated that approximately 46,800 meals were generated by the 2010 festival (Phelan, 2010).

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<3,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	23,400

Table 1 – Pounds of edible foods, foodstuffs and related supplies collected at SobeFest by year

The wealth, glamour and culinary abundance of the SobeFest contrast dramatically with a needy South Florida community that suffers from an overall poverty rate of 14.9%, above the national average (Bishaw, 2010). Moreover, the region suffers from a food insecurity rate of 12.2% and a child food insecurity rate of over 20% (Feeding America). Food insecurity occurs when an individual or entire household experiences limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally-adequate, safe food (Sherman, 2004). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures food insecurity annually through its Food Security Supplement, an instrument administered alongside the monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) to 60,000 American households by the U.S. Census Bureau (National Research Council, 2005). The USDA further breaks down food insecurity into two categories; food insecurity without hunger (able to get food through charitable and emergency agencies) and food insecurity with hunger,

the latter category referring to those people that relief agencies still cannot adequately reach and supply.

The USDA's most recent report on food insecurity shows a dramatic rise from 11.1% of US households in 2007, to 14.6% in 2008 (Noyd & Andrews, November, 2009). Locally in South Florida, there were 668,000 food insecure people with 214,000 of them being children in 2007. That total increased to 908,000 for 2008, an increase of over 35% from the previous year (Food Research and Action Center, 2010).

	2006	2007	2008
# Food Insecure Households	650,000	668,000	908,000
% Increase over Previous Year		2.7%	35.9%

Table 2 – Food Insecure Households in South Florida, total per year

Compounding the problem is a larger-than-average homeless population, particularly in the winter months. Reliable statistics on homeless populations are by nature not available, and results of the latest effort by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Service-Based Enumeration (SBE) of 2010, are yet to be published. It has been estimated, however, that from 2009-2011 the homeless population across the U.S. will increase by 1.5 million, due in large part to the recession (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). Florida's homeless population traditionally increases in the wintertime, presumably attracted by better weather than northern regions. South Florida has the added pressure of a larger influx of illegal immigrants over most other American cities.

Social welfare agencies struggle to keep up with the demand of homeless shelters, soup kitchens, youth programs, day care and other facilities. South Florida's demand for such services increases during the winter time due to the additional influx of homeless individuals. Officials are only able to meet 80-90% of the demand for emergency food assistance, according to a nationwide survey of major cities (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007).

City officials, in order to try to meet this increased demand, are creating more shelters and food distribution outlets, or enlarging existing ones. Where will the increased food supplies come from to meet this growing demand?

The theoretical foundation for the study emanates from the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), generally attributed to Bowen (1953) and further developed by Heald (1970) and contemporaries. Contrary to economist Milton Friedman (1962), who argued that corporations should not involve themselves in such activities not directly attributable to bottom-line profits, Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter (2002) suggested that

corporations should seek projects and initiatives that provide social benefits to the community as well as financial benefits to the firm. Today, it is much easier to convince companies to contribute to socially-responsible causes. The vast majority (more than 80%) of Fortune 500 companies currently declare dedicated CSR spending in their Annual Reports (Sasse & Trahan, 2007). As companies expand and globalize, they come under increased pressure from all stakeholders to contribute in socially responsible ways to the local communities in which they operate, and their executives are increasingly inclined to do so.

Catering operations now have an opportunity to join in this CSR trend. A quality caterer plans so as to never run out of food at a given event and this overproduction must be disposed of once the event is concluded. Hospitality companies and other organizations have, in the past, been reluctant to donate these already-prepared foods for fear of liability issues. Event organizers were concerned if they donated food to a charity, that perhaps an individual who eats this food the next day might become ill and sue the original caterer for a product that has long left their control (Hansen, 1995).

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act (1996), signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton, changed the rules of the game going forward. This act was established in order to "encourage the donation of food and grocery products to nonprofit organizations for distribution to needy individuals, the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act precludes civil and criminal liability arising from food donated in good faith, except in cases of gross negligence or intentional misconduct".

The major aim of this case study is to review how the 2010 SobeFest was able to dramatically improve efficiencies to take advantage of the catering overproduction that is typical of this and similar festivals, to redistribute unused foods, foodstuffs, and related dry goods that could directly benefit the large food-insecure population of South Florida. Through interviews of many of the SobeFest's stakeholders, the authors seek to:

1. Review how this food recovery activity developed over the five-year history of its collections at the event.
2. Outline and elaborate on methods and procedures employed in the 2010 event.
3. Suggest possible improvements that may be added to the 2011 event.
4. Suggest how these methods might be emulated by event producers, caterers and food bank operators in other communities.

Central to this type of effort is the philanthropic appeal that must be made to the various sponsors, exhibitors and restaurateurs that participate in the festival. The experience of the 2010 SobeFest has shown that even a mild appeal, if well organized, can lead to dramatically-improved results in terms of collections of catering overproduction (Phelan, 2010). The researchers hypothesize that greater advance planning combined with earlier and greater appeal

to the participating corporate sponsors and restaurateurs will yield even greater results in the 2011 edition of the event.

This holistic case study intends to combine participant observations with personal interviews at both ends of the equation, i.e.: at the food bank as well as with festival organizers and participating sponsors, exhibitors and restaurateurs. Preliminary interviews and observations will be made with the intermediating agency Feeding South Florida. Protocols for observations and focused interviews are under development for each of these contact points that will serve to better understand the many processes and procedures, seek professional opinions as well as suggestions that may lead to greater efficiencies in the overall collection and distribution effort.

It is anticipated that the report on the study, when completed, may be read and emulated in other communities by event organizers, catering companies, city officials that sponsor large events, as well as restaurateurs that may participate in such events. It is hoped that such shared knowledge may lead to increased cooperation among these event organizers and participants with their local social welfare agencies and their supporters. In so doing it is posited that hunger will be reduced, even if temporarily, in each such community where this type of organization and cooperation is fostered.

The goal of this paper is to show that by following a strategic plan of action, any catering company, restaurant, hotel or other hospitality entity may efficiently dispose of catering overproduction in a socially responsible way that helps to feed those who need it most in the local community. Few hospitality companies do this today, strategically, institutionally. Marriott International is exceptional in that the company established a strategic relationship with America's Second Harvest, now known as Feeding America, as early as 1992 (Marriott International, 2010). Marriott has recently released its third annual CSR report, with the most recent reporting against the Global Reporting Initiative. One other notable hospitality contributor is catering giant Sodexo which, as one of its 14 CSR commitments, vows to fight hunger and malnutrition through its STOP Hunger program (Sodexo, 2009)

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